

262 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

Gardiner, quoting a passage from Macaulay's essay on Hallam, incidentally observes that his 'judgement of a political situation was as superb, as his judgement of personal character was weak' ; and the observation is very true.¹ Macaulay had little insight into men's motives and very little sympathy or imagination. He made no serious attempt to appreciate the beliefs and ideas of men from whom he differed—to put himself in their place. Though he describes characters at great length the hardness of the lines and the crudeness of the colouring give most of his portraits the air of caricatures. As Leslie Stephen says, ' He likes to represent a man as a bundle of contradictions because it enables him to obtain startling contrasts. He heightens a vice in one place, a virtue in another and piles them together in a heap without troubling himself to ask whether nature can make such monsters or preserve them if made. To anyone given to analysis these contrasts are actually painful/ ²

It is curious that in one of Macaulay's essays there is a passage which illustrates his own error. He is comparing the drawing of a character (Sardanapalus) in one of Byron's plays, with a similar character (Otho) drawn by Juvenal. After quoting Juvenal, Macaulay proceeds :

These are excellent lines in a satire. But it is not the

business of the dramatist to exhibit characters
in this sharp
antithetical way. It is not thus that
Shakspeare makes
Prince Hal rise from the rake of Eastcheap
into the hero of
Shrewsbury, and sink again into the rake of
Eastcheap.
It is not thus that Shakspeare has exhibited
the union of
effeminacy and valour in Antony. A dramatist
cannot
commit a greater error than that of following
those pointed

¹ Cromwell's Place in History (1902), p. 17.

- Op. cit. ii. 365.